DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 480 133 TM 035 209

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TITLE	Portfolios, Performance Assessments, and Standards Based Learning in Educational Leadership.
PUB DATE	2002-08-00
NOTE	7p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Council of Professors of Educational Administration (Burlington, VT, August 2002).
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Alternative Assessment; Elementary Secondary Education; *Performance Based Assessment; *Portfolio Assessment; Portfolios (Background Materials); *Scoring Rubrics; *Standards; Student Evaluation

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the use of portfolios, performance assessments, and standards-based learning. The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education and other professional groups call for performance assessments that are as authentic as possible, and authenticity, in this context, means resembling real-world challenges. A portfolio is simply a collection of these authentic tasks organized to demonstrate student competence in various standards. Portfolios can be used in a variety of ways, but should be guided by design principles whether in paper and pencil or electronic formats. Portfolio design begins with preplanning that includes definition of contents. Development of scoring guides and effective rubrics is essential so that the portfolio can be constructed to meet these rubrics and then evaluated through them. (Contains 12 references.) (SLD)

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ED 480 133

Portfolios, Performance Assessments, and Standards Based Learning In Educational Leadership

Paper presented at the annual National Council of Professors of Educational Administration Conference, Burlington, Vermont. August, 2002.

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TM035209

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Portfolios, Performance Assessments, and Standards Based Learning

In Educational Leadership

The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) has developed revised standards by which to judge the quality of graduate programs that prepare future school leaders. The standards developed by this consortium are built on the Standards for School Leaders developed by the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC). The consortium that does the review of program accreditation, the Educational Leadership Constituent Council (ELCC), uses these revised standards for leadership preparation program evaluation (2002). In addition to the efforts of NCATE, the recently published Technology Standards for School Administrators (TSSA) place significant emphasis on programs that develop the technology skills of future administrators (2001).

There is little question these changes require a corresponding change in classroom practice for both leadership candidates and professors in educational leadership preparation programs. ELCC now encourages professors of educational leadership to use authentic performance activities as assessments rather than traditional tests. Performance assessments, by definition, should be as authentic as possible, present a demanding task, and require fairly high-level skills (Popham, 1997). Authentic, in this context, means resembling real-world challenges, such as school improvement planning, using data for school improvement, or constructing a communication plan. A portfolio is simply a collection of these authentic tasks organized in a way to demonstrate student competency in various standards.

Portfolios can be used in a variety of ways, including portfolios for a specific course, for a prescribed block of courses, or for a complete program as an assessment organizer to demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and dispositions gained from selected learning activities (Stader, Von Krosigh, & Neely, 2001). Portfolios can be presented in the traditional paper and pencil design, in an electronic format, or in some combination. However, the growing trend to use technology in educational leadership program design supports the utilization of an electronic portfolio format. Once one considers most candidate documents are created on computer, many principal candidates are technologically literate, and most candidates have a wide range of technology available, the jump to an electronic format is not a quantum one. In addition, future school administrators need not only technology skills, but also need an understanding of how to use technology to improve communication, planning, and data management effectiveness (Johnson & Barleson, 2001). The electronic portfolio can be an excellent tool to illustrate and teach these concepts.

However, the availability of hardware and software, the relative technical sophistication of candidates and professors, and the availability of technical assistance must be considered before a final determination of the format can be made. Helen Barrett (1998) provides an excellent series of assessment questions to help guide this part of the decision-making process. In addition, portfolios create significant design challenges and are not without problems and critics (Berger, 1997, Popham, 1997). First and foremost, portfolios require a change in teaching methodology. Specifically, portfolios do not fit the traditional lecture, test, and grade format and require significant changes in curriculum,

instruction, and assessment techniques. Further, portfolios are notoriously difficult to assess (Berger, 1997), and the purpose of the portfolio can get lost in the glitz and glamour of the technology. However, these difficulties are not insurmountable. This manuscript is designed to aid in the design and assessment of portfolios in both paper and pencil and electronic formats.

Portfolio design

Preplanning, along with the development of rubrics, is the most important and difficult segment of portfolio design. Grant Wiggens and Jay McTighe (1998) suggest one effective planning guide. This design begins with a listing of essential questions. Essential questions should be designed to promote inquiry, be reasonable in number, and not answerable in a true/false or multiple-choice format. The essential questions become the basis for thematic units. The essential question for each thematic unit is further refined into a series of "entry point questions" which guide the teaching, learning and assessment of the unit.

The essential and unit questions serve as the basis for the second preplanning stage, the selection and design of performance assessments to illustrate mastery of the important skills. The next step is the development of a scoring guide or rubric. After the essential questions, performance assessments, and scoring guides have been developed, a curricular scope and sequence can be determined and instructional strategies selected. At this point a decision must be made regarding the portfolio format, ranging from completely electronic to a paper and pencil product.

A plan to **introduce the portfolio to candidates** follows. Some considerations may include:

- Purpose (goals) of the portfolio
- Contents of the portfolio
- Assessment
- Opportunities for feedback

A **pre-reflection** can be designed around the essential questions as a preliminary self-assessment of knowledge, skills, and dispositions. The pre-reflection may also serve as a valuable comparison to post reflections to demonstrate student growth.

The contents of the portfolio may vary depending on the purpose of the portfolio. However, the following suggestions may serve as a guide:

a. Title Page
b. Table of Contents
c. Segments: Each thematic unit (essential question) may contain the following
    i. Introduction
        1. Defines the content of a specific segment of the portfolio
        2. Defines the standards related to this segment
    ii. Knowledge Base
        1. Summary of the knowledge gained or acquired
    iii. Application Base
        1. How this knowledge can be applied in the school setting
            a. Artifacts, performances, videos, demonstration, etc tied to specific standards

iv. Reflection

1. What the student thinks or believes about how the learning activities may relate to their own future practice. These reflections can be compared to the pre-reflection writing to determine and demonstrate growth.

The **Selected Resource/Bibliography** is a list of resources relevant to the standards addressed in the curriculum.

Development of Scoring Guides

The term rubric has evolved into the term used to describe scoring guides for assessing the quality of student learning. Rubrics are usually used with a relatively complex assignment, such as a culminating project, an essay, or a portfolio. A sample culminating project and scoring guide is illustrated in table one. All rubrics share three commonalties: 1) evaluative criteria, 2) quality definitions, and 3) a scoring strategy (Popham, 1997, Goodrich, 1997, & Andrade 2000).

Rubrics can either be holistic or analytic. In the holistic strategy, the evaluative criteria are considered and a single, overall quality judgement is derived. An analytic strategy requires a criterion-by-criterion approach that may or may not be aggregated into an overall score (Popham, 1997). Regardless of the rubric strategy, good rubrics make instructor expectations very clear and improve performance by showing students how to meet these expectations (Goodrich, 1997, Andrade, 2000). The point of rubrics is to guide students toward the production of better final products (Goodrich, 1997), not disaggregate students. Consequently, candidates should always have ample time to revise their work after either peer or instructor pre-assessment (Goodrich, 1997).

However, rubrics are difficult to develop. James Popham (1997) lists four common rubric flaws. Many rubrics display task-specific evaluative criteria. In other words, the rubric is specific for a task. Good rubrics capture the essential ingredients of the skill to be measured, not the particular display of that skill. Another common flaw is excessively general evaluative criteria. Effective rubrics must provide guidance for instructors and candidates about what is genuinely significant. Another shortcoming is dysfunctional detail. Lengthy rubrics are not useful. In contrast, short but useful rubrics are far more valuable to instructors and candidates. The final flaw is equating the test of the skill with the skill itself. For example, grading the specific strategies selected for a school improvement plan evaluates candidates selecting strategies consistent with instructor beliefs.

Effective rubrics:

- Contain three-five teachable evaluative criteria (Popham, 1997)
- Contain evaluative criterion that represent key attributes of the skill being assessed (Popham, 1997).
- Avoid unclear and unnecessarily negative language (Goodrich, 1997)
- List criteria and articulate levels of quality (Andrade, 2000)
- Involve candidates in the development, critique, and use of evaluative criteria.

Summary

Portfolios are congruent with required changes in administrator candidate assessment. Several positive benefits can be derived from portfolios. Portfolios spark reflection and foster professional growth, leadership skills, self-assessment skills, self-confidence, risk taking, and professional dialoguing (Brown & Irby, 1997). Portfolios can be useful to candidates as an interview tool (Education Placement Consortium 2000, Brown & Irby, 1997), and as a method for demonstrating candidate knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary for program assessment (Stader, Von Krosigh, & Neely, 2001). In addition, electronic portfolio formats can serve as an excellent model for improving candidate technology skills and can greatly increase understanding of the uses of technology to improve leadership effectiveness.

Table One
Sample Performance Assessment Scoring Guide
ELCC Standards: 1.2, 3.2, 3.3, 4.1, 4.2, & 5.1

The Superintendent explains that your primary assignment for the coming fall term will be to develop a **strategic plan** to address school/community relations in the Riverbed District. The superintendent has promised to provide the resources necessary for the implementation and success of this plan. The plan should contain:

1. Two Goals
2. Two objectives per goal
3. Two literature based strategies per objective
4. Action steps for each objective
5. Each action step requires
    a. Specific activities
    b. Timelines
    c. Person responsible
    d. Resources
6. Evaluation for each objective
7. Bibliography

Scoring Guide*

Accomplished: There is clear, convincing, and consistent evidence that the plan demonstrates an excellent understanding of school/community relations, is multifaceted, and provides for ongoing partnerships with a wide range of publics. The plan demonstrates equity and fairness, values all opinions, and creates a variety of opportunities for improved communication with all publics.

Proficient: There is clear evidence that the plan demonstrates a basic understanding of school/community relations, provides for ongoing partnerships with some publics, and has several facets. The plan demonstrates an understanding of equity and fairness, values most opinions, and creates several opportunities for improved communication with all publics.

Developing: There is limited evidence that the plan demonstrates an understanding of school/community relations, effective planning, the importance of equity and fairness, or the importance of effective communication with a variety of publics.

* Based on Hessel, K. & Holloway, J. (2002). *A framework for school leaders: Linking the ISLLC standards to practice.* Princeton, NJ: ETS

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